

## THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Omar Greg Conrad  
University of Kansas

*Mid-American Review of Sociology*, 1992, Vol XVI, No. 2: 37-56

*This paper illustrates the close affinity between the critical theorist's depiction of the authoritarian personality and Jean-Paul Sartre's portrait of the anti-semite and critically examines the solutions to the problem of anti-semitism these thinkers suggest. In order to accomplish these goals an extended discussion of Sartre's views on freedom and bad-faith is also presented.*

*"The Jew only serves him [the anti-semite] as a pretext; elsewhere his counterpart will make use of the Negro or the man of yellow skin."—Jean-Paul Sartre (1948: 54).*

### *Introduction*

This essay will attempt to draw a character sketch of the personality of anti-semites in the hope that this sketch will point to ways in which the problem of anti-semitism might be reduced.

In order to draw this character sketch this essay will draw on previous character sketches of the personality of anti-semites. Specifically this essay will draw on the sketch described as the authoritarian personality by the critical theorists, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford in their book of the same name, and Jean-Paul Sartre's sketch created in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Many important points of congruence between Sartre and Adorno et al. will be pointed out as a synthesis of their views is constructed.

Two seeming digressions from the main topic of this essay will have to be made in order to clarify the sketches of both the critical theorists and Sartre. In order to explain Sartre's sketch of the personality of anti-semites this essay will devote its first section to an attempt to construct what we shall refer to as Sartre's social psychology. In order to clarify both Sartre's sketch and especially the sketch presented by the critical theorists this essay will devote its second section to a brief enumeration of the historical conditions within which past anti-semitic movements found fertile soil.

There are several things this essay will not do which need to be made clear since they point to the limitations of this investigation. Although this essay will sketch some of the history of the era in which the critical theorists and Sartre wrote, no attempt will be made to reconstruct the specific historical developments of anti-semitic movements in the United States or Europe. Thus this essay will not give a historical argument to explain the development of anti-semitism.

This essay will also lack any extended discussion of the social movements perspective on anti-semitism. In spite of the importance of looking at anti-semitic movements from a social movements perspective, the critical theorists and Sartre were interested in approaching anti-semitism from a different angle. Rather than concentrate on different social backgrounds in an effort to explain why some people become anti-semites, the critical theorists wanted to know why certain people of similar social backgrounds choose to become anti-semites and others choose not to become anti-semites. The critical theorists and Sartre felt the answer to this question lay in character structure.

This essay will also lack an empirical psychological study of contemporary Americans and Europeans. This is important because even if the critical theorists empirically discovered a personality type that was more susceptible to anti-semitic propaganda than most, that personality type may no longer exist in the contemporary world. It is the belief of the essayist, however, that once one considers what the critical theorists argued were the origins of the authoritarian personality, that it indeed still exists.

All of these disclaimers will hopefully be answered in a future work.

Finally, the assumptions of this essay should be made explicit. This essay is not a value-free exercise in social psychology. We assume that anti-semitism is an ethically repugnant feature of our world. We assume that people have various personalities and that there may be a personality type which is more susceptible to anti-semitic propaganda than most. And we assume that it is desirable to attempt to find ways in which to curb this tide of hate.

#### SARTRE'S SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY:

Human beings, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, are "condemned to be free." (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 353). The question is, what exactly does this condemnation to be free mean?

Sartre argues that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre (1956) 1975: 348). By existence preceding essence Sartre means that there is no transcendent essence of what it means to be human preceding life. Thus Sartre argues that human beings have no transcendent "human nature" which determines them: first we exist as human beings, and only then do we decide (or let others decide for us) what this existence as a human being means (Sartre (1956) 1975: 348-350). In other words, human beings are in some important sense free to decide what it means for them to exist: what meaning life has for them; what meaning death has for them.

Moreover, by the "condemnation" to be free Sartre means that we cannot escape from having to choose (or let others choose for us) what it means for us to exist. Indeed, Sartre will refer to all actions by us to attempt to posit that there is some transcendent meaning or human essence to life as acts of bad-faith (or self-deception). Before discussing bad-faith, however, it will help to clarify what Sartre is not arguing, as well as to explore what he means when he writes that humans have no "excuses" for their actions.

Sartre is not arguing that the meaning we attach to our lives is a-social or a-historical. Sartre understands human beings in a social psychological way, i.e., as creatures which interact with each other and influence each other's conception of their self including feelings of self-worth (Sartre, 1956: 301-303). Indeed, Sartre goes so far as to argue that in order to understand human beings "it is necessary to consider biological, psychical, and social phenomena in a spirit of synthesis" (Sartre, 1948: 59). This is hardly an a-sociological or a-historical point of view.

For Sartre, however, it is of grave importance not to forget that in addition to the biological, psychological and sociological context within which a person finds oneself, that person makes free choices. One chooses amongst an array of options [to create one's self (Sartre (1956) 1975: 350)] despite the fact that these options are delimited by the synthesis of one's biological, psychological and social situation.

Moreover, according to Sartre, if humans are free, then they are responsible for their own actions (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 353). In other words humans have no excuses.

In *Existentialism is a Humanism* [or as Sartre actually titled it, *Is Existentialism a Humanism?* (Contat & Rybalka, 1974: 133)], Sartre explains more precisely what he means by human beings having no excuses by drawing on Soren Kierkegaard's text *Fear and Trembling*. This essay shall move back and forth between Kierkegaard's text and Sartre's reading of that text.

In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard tells us the story of Abraham and Isaac: the story of the sacrifice of Isaac which Abraham was commanded by an angel of God to perform (Kierkegaard, 1985: 45). Kierkegaard reminds us that Abraham is considered praiseworthy for his great faith (Kierkegaard, 1985: 49-56). Rather than question God, or disobey God, or even show up late for the sacrifice because of doubts and despair, Abraham takes Isaac to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed.

And yet, the same God which commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, was also the God which commanded the Israelites not to kill (murder). Kierkegaard raises the issue throughout the text of *Fear and Trembling* as to whether or not Abraham might not indeed question whether the angel which commanded him to sacrifice Isaac was indeed an Angel of God. Might not one wonder if such an Angel was of Lucifer?

Kierkegaard concludes that Abraham had faith, but that Abraham's faith cannot be understood without also understanding his anguish.

"The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac; but in this contradiction lies...anguish" (Kierkegaard, 1985: 60).

What does the anguish of Abraham mean? For Sartre (and not necessarily Kierkegaard, since Kierkegaard makes his famous leap to faith in the christian God) the anguish of Abraham would seem to be the anguish of all human beings. The situation of humans is one in which people are forced to make

decisions day after day without "true" recourse to any divine foundation, scientific foundation, social foundation, nor any "systematic" foundation for their decisions: The point is that even when God or science or society commands us to do something, we are still free in an important sense, for we have to decide whether or not we shall obey.

This places the entire weight of our existence squarely upon our shoulders (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 349-350). In the final analysis, we must make our own decisions; we are responsible for those decisions, and we are without excuse for those decisions, i.e., we are condemned to be free.

Moreover, Sartre argues that the nature of human consciousness is to be conscious of the nothingness of itself (Sartre, KA, 1975: 299). By this Sartre means that human beings are aware (in some fundamental way) of the "fact" that they are not determined by any transcendent human nature, i.e., that their consciousness is a nothingness before they exist. The question thus becomes, do we have a self which is given to us by our biology or society?

Sartre claims to be highly skeptical in regards to the question of biological inheritance (Sartre, 1948: 59), but with a great deal of qualifications to be expanded on below the answer to the question of whether or not society "gives" us a self is in some sense yes.

At one point in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre seems to refer to this self as the "given" (Sartre, 1956: 615-6 & 671). Sartre argues however that "consciousness is a pure and simple negation of the given, and it exists as the disengagement from a certain given and as an engagement toward a certain not yet existing end" (Sartre, 1956: 615). What Sartre seems to mean by this is that though we have a "given" or a "self" we exist as consciousness by disengaging ourselves from this given, or by negating this given. Furthermore, we exist as consciousness by engaging ourselves in a project towards some future end (and presumably a future given).

Sartre makes his point more explicit when he explains that because human consciousness is a nothingness people attempt to fill this nothingness that they are, by negating things or others outside of themselves as that which they are not (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 299). By this Sartre means that human beings tend to define their sense of self by what they are not. For example, as children we begin by realizing that we are not the ball, we are not mommy, etc. As adults we continue in this vein by thoughts like, 'I am not a communist.'

People also attempt to fill the nothingness of their consciousness by affirmative statements (about who or what they are) as well as negative statements (about who or what they are not). The range of these self-identifiers will of course be delimited by our society, and others may choose to place such identifiers upon us (and we may indeed choose to agree with the identifiers others place upon us). Sartre, however, sees all such self-identifiers as acts of bad-faith if we reify them into transcendent categories which define who we are, or if we use them as an excuse for our actions.

Bad-faith, according to Sartre, is an act in which one attempts to deceive one's self about one's self (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 300.) In the case of an act of

bad faith then, the liar and the duped are one and the same person (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 302).

The problem is, however, that insofar as one is conscious of one's self engaging in an act of bad-faith (self-deception) one acts in good-faith (self-honesty) (Sartre, (1956) 1975:302). Bad-faith thus "vacillates continually between good faith and cynicism" (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 303). Because of this vacillation, Sartre describes the existence of bad-faith as "metastable." Nevertheless, bad-faith proves quite durable, and is quite common, according to Sartre (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 302-303). The reason bad-faith is common would appear to be simple, since at bottom it represents an attempt to escape from our condemnation to be free (Sartre, (1956) 1975: 322).

In addition to others labeling us with their own definitions of our essence, such as Jew, or ugly, or clever, others constitute "a real limit to our freedom" (Sartre, 1956: 672). For example, "Because I am a Jew I shall be deprived—in certain societies—of certain possibilities, etc." (Sartre, 1956: 671). This limit to our freedom that others make for us occurs because they see us as someone we have not chosen to be (Sartre, 1956: 672). "Still it is necessary to understand this: the limit imposed does not come from the action of others" (Sartre, 1956: 672). Any action or prohibition done or placed upon us by others "can have meaning only through the foundation of my free choice. In fact...I can disobey...pay no attention...[or] confer upon it [or them] a coercive value [or force]" (Sartre, 1956: 672). In other words, it is not the specific actions of others which places limits on my freedom, but rather my free choice to let their actions or prohibitions decide for me what I shall do. Of course I may choose to value my life or limb more than I value going against the other's actions or prohibitions!

Thus the freedom which Sartre writes about should not be misconstrued as an almighty capricious and unpredictable freedom. Sartre argues instead that we are absolutely free to choose to attempt to change ourselves or our situation in the world, although we may indeed encounter circumstances which are so racked against us as to deny us the freedom to succeed in our attempt (Sartre, 1956: 621-2). For example, "We shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison," which would be the freedom to succeed in one's projects, "but that he is always free to try to escape," which is the freedom to choose one's projects (Sartre, 1956: 622).

Sartre further argues that some projects (which we shall refer to as primary) may constitute our character if we choose them to such an extent that they determine our later decisions (Sartre, 1956: 584-5, & 705). In other words, "character is a vow" (Sartre, 1956: 705) Note that we are still free to change in the future but to change would mean to change at a great cost since we would have to change our primary project (Sartre, 1956: 584-585). We should also note that though others will attempt to "give" us a character by the identifiers which they place upon us we still must make a decision to accept or attempt to negate those identifiers of our character (Sartre, 1956: 705-6). In this decision lies our freedom.

Notice that while we yet live it is impossible for anyone (including ourselves) to take away the freedom of which Sartre writes. It is this aspect of his work that might be referred to as a humanism, and which found a popular audience in the aftermath of World War II.

In order to more fully understand Sartre's work as well as the critical theorists' work on anti-semitism this essay shall consider the social and historical times in which they worked and in which anti-semitism flourished.

#### THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ANTI-SEMITISM:

Sartre was born in Paris in 1905. By the time he had written *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, Sartre had lived through World War One as a youth, the Spanish Civil War, and was now living through the Second World War. Sartre had also lived through the "great" depression and had seen the rise of bolshevism in Russia. Needless to say, Sartre was living in an era of political and economic upheaval and change: an era in which Nazism and anti-semitism would find fertile soil.

The stark loss of life alone was "the most obvious and immediate" consequence of World War I where eight million Europeans were killed, and seven million permanently disabled (Kitchen, 1988: 22). No doubt the most obvious effect on the everyday lives of those who survived either world war was the simple loss of life and limb all around them.

Between the wars values and lifestyles change in several non-trivial ways. Divorce rates doubled and associated with this change in family structure was a general "loosening of moral standards" along with a rise in urbanization (Kitchen, 1988: 23).

Despite all the scientific and technological advances being made around the world, the ability of politicians, social scientists, and philosophers to stabilize economies and keep Europe from war was far from adequate. The faith in reason and progress, fostered during the Enlightenment, faltered, as reason and scientific advances were shown to be as applicable to the destruction of life, as they were to life's enhancement (Lavine, 1984: 326-7).

It was a time in the societies of Europe which Emile Durkheim might have described with his concept of anomie. Durkheim argued that the only source of morality greater than the individual (and in a certain sense the only source of morality at all) was found in the collectivity. But when those collectivities collapsed, or were no longer seen as legitimate, the result was anomie, as individuals became estranged from the collective morality, and found themselves without resources to determine right from wrong (Durkheim, 1933: xxxiv-v).

Interestingly enough, the same social and historical context in which Sartre lived and developed his views may also have been in part responsible for the rise of anti-semitism.

In *Prophets of Deceit*, (a book which formed part of the series *Studies in Prejudice* of which *The Authoritarian Personality* was a part) by Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, the rise of anti-semitism in America is discussed as being in part a result of "social malaise." By "social malaise" they refer to the distrust

of foreigners and foreign ways; the sense of helplessness many people feel; the feeling that one is excluded from the good things in life; the anxiety or fear of immanent disaster; and disillusionment with politics (Lowenthal, et. al., 1949: 13-14).

"Malaise is a consequence of the depersonalization and permanent insecurity of modern life. Yet it has never been felt among people so strongly as in the past few decades. The inchoate protest, the sense of disenchantment, and the vague complaints and forebodings that are already perceptible in the late nineteenth century art and literature have been diffused into general consciousness.... The intermittent and unexpected acts of violence on the part of the individual and the similar acts of violence to which whole nations can be brought are indices of this underground torment" (Lowenthal, et. al., 1949: 17).

Lowenthal and Guterman argue that the social malaise is real and the anti-semites are "right" to recognize it as real. The problem with the anti-semites, however, is that rather than attack the "real" cause of social malaise, namely either an "obsolete form of society" or "a poor organization of an adequate society" the anti-semites attack the Jews.

Furthermore, modern rabid anti-semitism seems to be linked with the rise of capitalism itself, in that Jews are often blamed for the depressions and other irrationalities of the modern capitalist economy. Indeed, Max Horkheimer in an essay entitled *The Jews in Europe* went so far as to say that anti-semitism can only be understood in the context of fascism, and fascism itself can only be understood as an outgrowth of liberal capitalism [Bronner et. al., (a reader) 1989:77-78]. (For more details on the subject of the development of capitalism and anti-semitism see David Smith's *The Social Construction of Enemies*.)

One qualifier to the preceding points should be made clear. Whatever the extent of social malaise and anomie in Europe or America, social malaise and anomie were not in themselves sufficient conditions to give rise to anti-semitism or Sartre's humanism. Anti-Jewish feelings have been around for a centuries, and many people have emphasized human freedom in their writings long before Sartre. What the social malaise in Europe and America helped to bring about however, was an increase in the popularity of anti-semitism on both continents and perhaps even an increase in the popularity of Sartre, at least for a short while.

Many scholars became interested in the problem of anti-semitism in this era. Among them were Sartre and the critical theorists, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.

#### ANTI-SEMITES AND AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITIES:

Sartre wrote many times on anti-semitism, but his main work was *Anti-Semite and Jew*. In it he draws a character sketch of anti-semites.

The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School were also interested in drawing character sketches. The critical theorists concerned themselves with illustrating what they called authoritarian personalities.

This section of this essay will compare Sartre's portrait with the portrait given by critical theory in an effort to synthesize the two views. It is hoped that this synthesis will then shed light on the remainder of the essay which shall concern itself with some solutions to the problem of authoritarian personalities and their propensity to become anti-semites. *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford, (and co-edited by Horkheimer and Flowerman,) begins straight away by arguing that,

"Although personality is a product of the social environment of the past, it is not, once it has developed, a mere object of the contemporary environment. What has developed is a structure within the individual, something which is capable of self-initiated action upon the social environment" (Adorno, 1982, p. 6).

Notice, that the statement that personality is not merely an object, but is also capable of self-initiated action upon the world bears considerable resemblance to Sartre's own description of the human situation as one in which humans are not merely a "given" but rather are free to attempt to choose themselves by their projects in the world. It would seem that the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* see a great deal of significance in the idea that human beings are not completely determined by their biology (as evidenced by their emphasis on social factors), society (as evidenced by their emphasis on psychology and personality), nor psychology (as evidenced by their emphasis on the personality being capable of self-initiated action upon the world).

The importance of self-initiated action upon the world should not be underestimated, for "The present writers [of *The Authoritarian Personality*] believe it is up to the people to decide whether or not this country [America] goes fascist" (Adorno, 1982: 10).

Further evidence of the openness to Sartre's views (at least on anti-semitism) is given by a footnote in the concluding remarks of *The Authoritarian Personality*. That footnote reads,

"There is marked similarity between the syndrome which we have labeled the authoritarian personality and "the portrait of the anti-Semite" by Jean-Paul Sartre (110). Sartre's brilliant paper became available to us after all our data had been collected and analyzed. That his phenomenological "portrait" should resemble so closely, both in general structure and in numerous details, the syndrome which slowly emerged from our empirical observations and quantitative analysis, seems to us remarkable" (Adorno, 1982: 475).

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* share another important feature with Sartre which concerns the way in which they begin their respective books. Sartre begins by suggesting the scenario of a dinner-party in which a discussion

of Jews comes up. The host or hostess of the party, in order to keep the discussion from becoming heated, says something like, 'everyone is entitled to their own opinion.'

"This word opinion...suggests that all points of view are equal; it reassures us, for it gives an inoffensive appearance to ideas by reducing them to the level of tastes. All tastes are natural; all opinions are permitted" (Sartre, 1965: 7).

But Sartre refuses "to characterize as opinion a doctrine that is aimed directly at particular persons and that seeks to suppress their rights or to exterminate them" (Sartre, 1965: 7). In other words, Sartre refuses to tolerate intolerance. (For a further critique of "dinner-party liberalism" see Sartre's essay *What is Literature*, especially pages 145-169.)

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* would seem to concur, for they argue in their own introduction that,

"There is one explanation for the existence of an individual's ideology [an organization of opinions, attitudes and values' (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 2)] that has not so far been considered: that is the view of the world which a reasonable man will organize for himself. This conception...is of crucial importance.... Without it we should have to share the destructive view, which has gained some acceptance in the modern world, that since all ideologies, all philosophies, derive from non-rational sources there is no basis for saying that one has more merit than another" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 11).

In other words, all ideologies and all philosophies are not mere opinions or tastes, and there is a basis for saying that some ideologies have more merit than others.

Moreover, anti-semitism "is something other than an idea. It is first of all a passion." (Sartre, 1965: 10).

What Sartre seems to mean by arguing that anti-semitism is better understood as a passion rather than an idea, is that for the anti-semite, his or her hatred of the Jews is not based on any direct experience or contact with specific Jews from which an idea of "Jewishness" might develop, but rather that for the anti-semite, "far from experience producing his idea of the Jew, it was the latter which explained his experience" (Sartre, 1965: 13). In other words, a passionate hatred of the Jews colors and distorts all actual experience with Jews for the Anti-Semite.

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* refer to this idea (in part at least) as stereotypy, which "involves an inability to experience Jews as individuals" (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 94), because the anti-semite sees all Jews as being one and the same. This tendency to see all Jews as one and the same would indeed color one's individual experiences with Jews. Indeed, the authors of the *The Authoritarian Personality* are skeptical of the possibility that interaction of anti-semites with actual Jews would really change anti-semitic beliefs. Their skepticism is based on the reasoning that what is needed is not actual experiences with Jews but rather a new capacity to experience (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 94-95).

If all that is done is to increase interaction with Jews everything the Jew does will still be turned against him or her. If the Jew attempts to be friendly, the anti-semiter, because of his or her inability to truly experience the Jew as an individual human being rather than as a stereotyped "Jew," will interpret the Jew's friendliness as nosiness and prying. If the Jew keeps his distance in order not to appear nosy and invading, the anti-semiter will interpret the Jew as standoffish and clannish. Unless a new capacity to experience the Jew without the lens of Jewish stereotyping that the anti-semiter wears is established everything the Jew does will be turned against him or her. "One cannot 'correct' stereotyping by experience; he has to reconstitute the capacity for having experiences" (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 309).

Moreover, according to Sartre, anti-semitism is no ordinary passion, for ordinarily people who choose a life of passion over reason "love the objects of passion" not hate them.

Sartre further argues that the anti-semiter chooses passion over reason, and/or chooses to reason falsely, "because of a longing for impenetrability. The rational man groans as he gropes for the truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative.... But there are people who are attracted to the durability of a stone.... They wish not to change" (Sartre, 1965: 18).

Notice, that this longing for the durability of a stone is an act of bad-faith. The anti-semiter attempts to escape from their condemnation to be free: from the responsibility for their own actions: and from the anguish which can go with the necessity to make one's own choices. The anti-semiter "chooses the irremediable out of fear of being free" (Sartre, 1965: 27).

Sartre writes that the passion which the anti-semiter has chosen, namely hate, "is a faith; at the outset he has chosen to devalue words and reasons. How entirely at ease he feels as a result" (Sartre, 1965: 19).

This devaluation of words and reason is crucial for, as the critical theorists point out, "examination of the specific characteristics comprising the imagery [of anti-semitism] reveals a basic contradiction in that no single individual or group as a whole could have all these characteristics" (Adorno, 1982: 94). For instance, Jews (who are all supposed to be alike) are blamed for both the "evils" of capitalism and bolshevism!

In addition to arguing that anti-semitism is a passion Sartre argues that anti-semitism is at the same time a "way of looking at the world" (Sartre, 1965: 17). The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* concur. Indeed, they argue in their discussion of the empirical work they have done on anti-semitism that "the first conclusion to be drawn...is that anti-Semitism is best conceived psychologically not as a specific aversion but as an ideology, a general way of thinking about Jews" (Adorno, 1982: 92).

This way of looking at the world is perhaps the most crucial aspect of anti-semitism, for it represents "at bottom a form of Manichaeism. It explains the course of the world by the struggle of the principle of Good with the principle of Evil" (Sartre, 1965: 40). The good is represented by the Gentile; the evil by the Jew. All one has to do to eliminate evil is eliminate the Jew. Good, for the

anti-semiter, thus consists of "purifying" society (Sartre, 1965: 43). "The advantages of this position are many. To begin with, it favors laziness of mind" (Sartre, 1965:43).

This type of thinking is lazy because "The Good is already given." One "has no need to seek it in anguish, to invent it, to scrutinize it...to prove it...or, finally, to shoulder the responsibilities of...moral choice" (Sartre, 1965: 44). This phrase, "to shoulder the responsibility of...moral choice" should be taken very seriously. Recall that for Sartre, the entire weight of our existence rests upon our own shoulders because we must make choices, including moral choices, and no one or god can make those choices for us. To seek to shirk the weight from our shoulders is to seek to shirk what it means to exist.

This general way of thinking about the Jews, or as the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* put it, the idea that "to know one [Jew] is to know all [Jews]" (Adorno, 1982: 94), is, according to Sartre, an act of bad-faith. It is not simply that the anti-semiter wants the durability of stone for him or herself, the anti-semiter wants the durability of stone for the Jew as well.

The anti-semiter claims on one hand that the Jews should change, and on the other hand, that the Jews cannot change. This catch-22 is perhaps the full expression of Manichaeism. Manichaeism is an act of bad-faith because it pretends that Jews are not (in the Sartrean sense of the word) free.

"But someone will object: What if he [the anti-semiter] is like that only with regard to the Jews? What if he otherwise conducts himself with good sense?" Sartre replies that "that is impossible" (Sartre, 1965: 21). For anti-semitism "involves the entire personality of the anti-Semite" (Sartre, 1965: 33). Indeed, anti-semitism seems to represent the anti-semites overall primary choice of a project in the world, i.e., their choice of character. Sartre goes on to add that anyone "who finds it entirely natural to denounce other men cannot have our conception of humanity" (Sartre, 1965: 21). The passionate hatred of the anti-semiter, according to Sartre, cannot merely be confined to the sphere of Jews. The critical theorists would seem to agree. Indeed, at the conclusion of *The Authoritarian Personality*, they argue that, "the most crucial aspect of the present study...is the demonstration of close correspondence in the type of approach and outlook a subject is likely to have in a great variety of areas, ranging from the most intimate features of family and sex adjustment through relationships to other people in general, to religion and to social and political philosophy" (Adorno, 1982: 475). In other words, the passion of the anti-semiter cannot be confined to one sphere. The anti-semiter's personality will be affected in every sphere of life (from family to religion to politics) by this Manichean world view.

This tendency for one's (or the anti-semiter's) personality to affect every sphere of one's (or the anti-semiter's) life is in part what leads Adorno to attempt to create a typology of personalities. This typology included what he described as the two most common personality types found in his research, namely, the conventional and the authoritarian personality.



Adorno begins his chapter on types of personalities by discussing the subject of typologies in psychological theory. Adorno admits that the use of typologies in psychology has been subjected to a great deal of criticism. "At the hub of all these arguments is the aversion against the application of rigid concepts to the supposedly fluid reality of psychological life" (Adorno, 1982: 346).

Adorno enumerates the critique of typologies by adding that since the use of typologies has been discredited for the mentally ill it would seem worthless to use typologies to classify the non-mentally ill (Adorno, 1982: 346). Furthermore, it should not be forgotten, that the very cause against which *The Authoritarian Personality* was written, namely Nazi Germany and anti-semitism, used typologies to characterize Jews (Adorno, 1982: 348). Indeed, the Nazi psychologist Jaensch did this.

Adorno admits that, "it cannot be doubted that the critique of psychological types expresses a truly humane impulse, directed against that kind of subsumption of individuals under pre-established classes which has been consummated in Nazi Germany" (Adorno, 1982: 348). But, Adorno adds later in his essay, "there is a typological element inherent in any kind of psychological theory" (Adorno, 1982: 350), and to completely abandon the use of typologies in psychology would be to abandon the use of psychology itself. This Adorno warns us, would be as irrational any of the "pigeonholing" schools" of psychology (Adorno, 1982: 350). In other words, although it may be a humane impulse to wish not to typologize other people, the complete dismissal of typologies would be tantamount to a complete dismissal of psychology itself, and such a dismissal would mean the end of an attempt to understand other people.

It would seem typologies are necessary, but in acknowledging that they are necessary one should take care to explain that no individual is bound and determined by any typology used to describe them. In other words we must take care that our tool (the typology) for explanation does not become an act of bad-faith on our own part, as it would be if we posited that others were not free.

Sartre would seem to concur. Rather than talk about typologies, Sartre discusses overall primary projects which a person chooses for themselves. Sartre, however, reminds us that at any moment we might choose to radically change ourselves by giving up our primary project and choosing a new one (Sartre, 1956: 584-612).

Adorno discusses several personality types but this essay shall limit itself to a discussion of the conventional and the authoritarian personality (or syndrome). Parallels to other works by critical theorists on the authoritarian personality will be drawn out, and an analysis of the genesis of the authoritarian personality will be presented. This analysis of the genesis of the authoritarian personality will hopefully shed light on some solutions to authoritarianism.

"Thinking in terms of ingroup and outgroup prevails" in personalities characterized by the conventional personality (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 158). Conventional prejudice "is a matter of course," and non-violent (Adorno, et. al.,

1982: 158). This lack of violent tendencies, however, is a product of a general acceptance of "the values of civilization and 'decency'" (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 158). Furthermore, the conventionalist tends to be "set against 'extremes' in every respect" (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 359). [If it is true that all that is needed for evil to triumph in the world is for good men and women to do nothing, then the conventionalist would seem to epitomize the type of person who might let evil triumph by their inaction.] There is also the danger that if rabid anti-semitism suddenly became popular, i.e., conventional and normal in some sense, the conventionalist might go along with it to the point of participating. This idea is hinted at by Adorno's statement concerning the fact the conventionalist lacks violent "impulses" because they are indecent according to the values of civilization.

[It is interesting to note that Sartre might call the conventional person a non-person because the conventional person is neither for nor against the Jew. Sartre challenges his readers in *Anti-Semite and Jew* to take sides. Better to be for or against the Jews because if you do nothing then you are "not anything," not even a person (Sartre, 1965: 51).]

The authoritarian personality, on the other hand, is characterized by what Fromm and Freud called the sado-masochistic character. Herbert Marcuse also discusses the authoritarian personality and describes them as seeing themselves as "heroic" men (Marcuse, 1988: 4).

In *Negations*, Marcuse argues that "long before World War I, the celebration of a new type of man became prevalent" (Marcuse, 1988: 4). This new type "was composed of traits from the age of the Vikings, German mysticism, the Renaissance, and the Prussian military" (Marcuse, 1988: 4). This new type of person was "bound to the forces of blood and soil," would travel "through heaven and hell," did not "reason why," but would go "into action to do and die." (Marcuse: 4.) This "hero" seems like the perfect soldier, proud, straight-backed, and obedient. This hero was a person of action not contemplation.

This "hero" however, is actually sado-masochistic as Fromm made clear in his widely read book *Escape from Freedom*. The "hero" is sadistic because they are willing to exterminate the outgroup (in our case the Jew) because the Jew doesn't belong to the ingroup (bound by blood and soil to each other).

Indeed, Sartre adds that anti-semitism "represents a basic sadism" and that "it is fun to be an anti-Semite" because "one can beat and torture Jews without fear" (Sartre, 1965: 46-7). Furthermore the "hero" is masochistic (or self-destructive) because they are willing to sacrifice themselves (both physically in terms of their life, and humanly in terms of their freedom as they give this freedom away by following the orders of the military machine) in order to attain their end, namely the "purification" of the homeland. Sartre would seem to concur. Sartre argues that "masochism is the desire to have oneself treated as an object" (Sartre, 1965: 107). In as much as Sartre argues that the anti-semitite acts in bad-faith in an attempt to be a "rock" (or an object) it would seem that the anti-semitite is masochistic. Sartre, however, rather than emphasize the anti-semites willing-

ness to die for their blood and soil, places the emphasis on the anti-semites' sacrifice of their freedom.

In *The Working Class in Weimer Germany* Fromm describes the authoritarian personality as an attitude that

"affirms, seeks out and enjoys the subjugation of men under a higher external power, whether this power is the state or a leader, natural law, the past or God. The strong and powerful are simply admired and loved for these qualities, the weak and helpless hated and despised.... Sacrifice and duty, and not pleasure in life and happiness, are the guiding aims of the authoritarian attitude." (Fromm, 1984: 209-210).

Needless to say, the authoritarian sees the Jews and all outgroups as weak and helpless in the physical sense, while at the same time seeing them as all threatening in the economic sense. (Indeed, Hitler seems to indicate in *Mein Kampf* that the Jew is dispicable because of his or her economic self-serving, and that the Jew is evil because he or she is not willing to sacrifice him or herself for the good of the group, whereas the true German is the exact opposite, willing and able to sacrifice him or herself for the glory of the homeland.)

Marcuse concurs with Fromm that "the strong and powerful are simply admired and loved for these qualities" (Fromm, 1984: 210), by the authoritarian. Marcuse states that the image of the heroizing of humanity "expanded to the vision of the charismatic leader whose leadership does not need to be justified on the basis of his aims" (Marcuse, 1988: 4). In other words, in the minds of the sado-masochistic self-proclaimed "heroes" the power the leader wields justifies any actions the leader takes.

Adorno concurs with this final point when he writes on the authoritarian syndrome. Adorno argues that one feature of the authoritarian syndrome "is the psychological equivalent of the 'no-pity-for-the-poor' ideology" (Adorno, et. al., 1982: 364). The authoritarian identifies (and finds gratification in identifying) with strength. The weak or the "down" are thus rejected.

Adorno also concurs that the "ingroup-outgroup dichotomy" is very important for this syndrome (Adorno: 363).

It should be noted that the crucial ingroup-outgroup dichotomy is an act of bad-faith if the ingroup and the outgroup are treated as transcendents (or rocks): the ingroup loved because they belong to the ingroup (and not because of their individual traits or accomplishments); the outgroup hated because they belong to the outgroup (and all their individual traits or accomplishments turned against them).

Much of what the critical theorists have to say about the genesis of authoritarianism and the ingroup-outgroup dichotomy centers around the family. For example in *The Authoritarian Personality* Sanford argues that aggression on the part of the child is aroused in two ways, "silence and distance" on the parent's part when the child "wants to be loved" and "authoritarian discipline without any demonstration of its purpose" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 398). In other words, a lack

of love combined with punishment that is arbitrary, chaotic, and irrational in the sense that the child does not know what it is for, arouses hostility in the child. Sanford argues, however, that this hostility, rather than being directed openly towards the parent (or authority figure) is redirected elsewhere because the parent "is conceived as too strong and dangerous" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 399). Authoritarians submit to the powerful authority, and "gain a sense of adequacy by participating psychologically" in the power of the authority (Adorno, et al., 1982: 400). Notice, that what is frightening in all of this is that the powerful authority becomes "right" because of their "might."

Recall that the hostility generated by a lack of love and arbitrary punishment is often redirected. Since the authoritarian admires power, the hostility is often redirected against the weak. Thus, the authoritarian fears weakness in him or herself (Adorno, et al., 1982: 400), and hates it in others. The authoritarian "thinks of people and groups in rigid categories of weak verses strong" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 404). "If one asks why he [the authoritarian] cannot have pity for weak people but instead actually hates them, the answer is two-fold. In the first place, they remind him too much of his own weakness and all the dreadful fear with which it is associated. Second, and probably more important, he believes weak people to be dangerous.... He believes they...resent it and will seek revenge in time.... The feeling of being persecuted [as a child] aroused in him [the authoritarian] the strongest impulses to violence...and he imagines that 'downtrodden' people are similarly motivated" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 405).

It should be noted that this vision of the world in terms of strong and weak is similar to the Manichean vision of good vs evil. And if Jews are perceived as the weak, evil, and threatening outgroup the authoritarian may choose to become an anti-semite.

If the true source of susceptibility to authoritarianism and anti-semitism lies in being unloved and subjected to irrational and arbitrary punishment as a child then it would seem that the course for correcting the authoritarian problem would be clear. "All that is really essential is that children be genuinely loved and treated as individual humans" (Adorno, et al., 479). The problem is that all the features of a program designed to produce non-ethnocentric personalities "would have the aspect of being more easily said than done." (Adorno, et al., p. 479). There may, however, be other "solutions" worth considering.

#### SOME "SOLUTIONS" TO AUTHORITARIANISM

One "solution" would be to appeal to the authoritarian's "susceptibility to external control" (Adorno, et al., p. 418).

"The appeal should not be made to his sympathy or to his conscience, but to his fear and submissiveness. He must be convinced that arrayed against the overt expression of his prejudices are the law, overwhelming numbers of people, numerous conventional authorities and prestige figures.... Those who stand for democracy...must convince him that they also have strength" (Adorno, et al., 1982: 418).



Sanford points out that there is a paradox in using the authoritarian's susceptibility to strength to encourage democratic tendencies—the paradox being that one is also increasing his or her susceptibility to anti-democratic movements, provided the anti-democratic movement shows strength. It should be noted that Sanford's paradoxical "solution" does not eliminate authoritarianism but simply makes use of it. Furthermore, Sanford's paradoxical "solution" does not help to keep individuals from developing authoritarian personalities.

Sartre proposes several methods for dealing with anti-semitism. The first is what he calls a "concrete liberalism" (Sartre, 1965: 146). "By that we mean that all persons who through their work collaborate toward the greatness of a country have the full rights of citizens of that country" (Sartre, 1965: 146). In other words what makes one a citizen should be what one does for one's country, not one's ethnic roots, race, or gender. Moreover one should not have to give up their ethnicity, race or gender in order to be a citizen. Just as "Women...are not asked to change their sex when they enter the voting booth" (Sartre, 1965: 146), no one should be asked to change their race or ethnicity when they become citizens. Sartre argues that we must accept the French Jew with his "character", "customs", "tastes", "religion", and "physical traits" as they are (Sartre, 1965: 147).

As far as more concrete means to the elimination of anti-semitism Sartre argues that schooling is important in that he hopes it will teach students "to avoid errors of passion" (Sartre, 1965: 147). Likewise laws against discrimination have their place. But Sartre warns that "laws have never embarrassed and never will embarrass the anti-Semite, who conceives of himself as belonging to a mystical society outside the bounds of legality" (Sartre, 1965: 148). In other words, the anti-semitite is on a Manichaean mission and can do no wrong as he or she sets about to exterminate the "evil" in the world. Sartre's reasoning combined with Sanford's on the subject of laws and the appeal to authority figures for the elimination of anti-semitism and authoritarianism would thus seem to be somewhat skeptical.

Sartre argues that the ultimate solution to the elimination of anti-semitism lies in the elimination of class struggle through the elimination of class itself.

"Anti-Semitism manifests the separation of men and their isolation in the midst of the community, the conflict of interests and the crosscurrents of passions: it can exist only in a society where a rather loose solidarity unites strongly structured pluralities; it is a phenomenon of social pluralism. In a society whose members feel mutual bonds of solidarity, because they are all engaged in the same enterprise [and thus have no differences based on class,] there would be no place for it." (Sartre, 1965: 149-150).

Notice the degree to which Sartre blames social structures of association for the development of anti-semitism. "It [anti-semitism] is a phenomenon of

social pluralism." The separation of people from a real community based on shared goals and enterprises would seem to be the result of a capitalist society based on competitive and exploitive class relations.

Sartre admits, however, that it is a lazy way out of the problem of anti-semitism to posit that the socialist revolution is the answer. Sartre thus continues by arguing that what is essential to be done is to point out to everyone "that the fate of the Jews is his fate" (Sartre, 1965: 153). "If we do not respect the person of the Israelite, who will respect us?" (Sartre, 1965: 151). No one "will be free so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fullness of their rights...[no one] will be secure so long as a single Jew...can fear for his life" (Sartre, 1965: 153).

The key to Sartre's plea for the fullness of the rights of the Jew lies in the phrase, "If we do not respect the person of the Israelite, who will respect us?" (Sartre, 1965: 151). In other words if we do not respect the Jew as a free human being (as opposed to an unfree and demonic or mystical being) then who will respect us as free human beings? This argument in some ways sounds as old as the golden rule but in other ways is quite profound. For just as people in Nazi Germany were afraid of being called "Jew" each of us could be "Jewish," in the sense that someone or some group of people might decide that the reasons we do the things we do are not because we are free and made choices, but rather are because we are Irish, or Black, or women, or men. To put it in the terms of critical theory, unless we stop seeing others through the lenses of stereotypy, others will never stop looking back at us using the same type of eyewear. Furthermore, each of us could belong to a group designated as the root of all evil. Misogynists have held women to be that group. American racists have held blacks to be that group. And it is not difficult to imagine someone holding all white males to be that group.

It is true, in Sartre's thought, that we are all already free in the sense that we can resist our jailers (or the others who in bad-faith attempt to define us—in the case of the Jews— the anti-semites) but this does not make the jailer any less at fault (Sartre, 1965: 136).

The critical theorists conclude, as mentioned earlier, that in order to decrease the chances of children developing authoritarian personalities all that is really needed is that the child be loved and not punished in an arbitrary and capricious way. Both Sartre's and the critical theorists' "solutions" would seem to offer some small guidance to anyone responsible for caring after children, whether they be parents or teachers or day-care workers.

The guidance falls into two categories which we shall refer to as punishment and the golden rule. In regards to punishment the critical theorists would argue that the children in question should have the reasons for their punishment (or constraints) spelled out for them in terms that they understand. This is important not only in order for them to develop a rational world view but also so they do not begin to resent the authority figure and redirect their hostility to "weak" outgroups. This is also important so that the child does not grow up to

be susceptible to strong authoritarian leaders, irregardless of what principles and values the leader stands for.

The second bit of guidance involves using the golden rule as a means for convincing children to not stereotype and discriminate against others. Sartre's plea for us to realize that the fate of the Jew could be the fate of us all is seemingly teachable at a very young age, and indeed should be re-taught at every age since many adults seem not to be aware of it.

The extent to which teachers, parents and day-care workers can teach the exact opposite of what is needed to avoid developing authoritarian personalities is frightening. We often teach children the anti-democratic idea that the only thing that matters is having power. Everytime one hears a parent or teacher tell a child not to do x,y, and z, and hear the parent or teacher respond to the child's query as to "why?" because "I told you so" one has witnessed the heart of fascism. Anyone responsible for the rearing of children who chooses democracy as one of their values must take care not to do this for by doing this one teaches children to respect only that which is mightier than themselves, and to hate anyone they perceive as weak.

#### CONCLUSION:

This essay has attempted to explain why some people of similar social backgrounds become anti-semites and others do not. In so far as the critical theorists and Sartre were on target with their explanations the answer lies in a character structure which seems especially likely to develop in a society characterized by social pluralism and a lack of real community. Anything which can be done to eliminate the development of authoritarian personalities would thus help to curb the appeal of anti-semitism.

We must teach children that authoritarians and those who would go through hell or high-water, without reasoning why, for King and country are not heroes to be admired and imitated: that authoritarians and the perfect soldiers are not pillars of courage, but rather that authoritarianism is at bottom an act of cowardice. To choose the durability of stone for one's self and one's ingroup (bound by blood and soil), and to choose the durability of stone for the hated outgroup (in our case the Jews) is cowardly because it represents an attempt to escape from one's freedom and responsibility. To choose not to reason why, but rather only to do and die, again represents this same cowardice. If our children must be taught tales of heroes then let us give them tales of heroes who think for themselves before they act, who do not follow a leader merely because the leader is strong, and who when they meet others meet individuals and not preconceived stereotypical constructions. In short, we must teach our children true courage: the courage to stand tall and free as thinkers, fully responsible for the choices they make.

#### REFERENCES

(Note: In general the latest editions of books were used. Earlier editions are listed in parenthesis.)

- Adorno, Theodore, et al. 1982. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Norton, (First published in 1950.)
- Bronner, Stephen, and Douglas Kellner. 1989. *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*. New York: Routledge. (This reader contains Max Horkheimer's essay "The Jews in Europe.")
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Free Press, 1984. (First published in the United States by Macmillan in 1933).
- Fromm, Erich. 1960. *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (First published in the United States under the title of *Escape from Freedom* in 1942.)
- Fromm, Erich. 1984. *The Working Class in Weimer Germany*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hitler, Adolf. 1971 (1943). *Mein Kampf*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Boston: The Houghton Miffling Company.
- Kaufman, Walter. 1975. *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Markham, Ontario: New American Library. [This work is an anthology with several important works by Sartre in it, including "Existentialism is a Humanism." This book was referred to as (KA) in the text. A shorter edition of this book was originally published by World Publishing Company, 1956.]
- Jay, Martin. 1973. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923- 1950*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. 1985. *Fear and Trembling*. Trans. Alastair Hannay. New York: Penguin Books.
- Kitchen, Martin. 1988. *Europe Between The Wars*. New York: Longman.
- Lavine, T. Z. 1984. *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophic Quest*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Lowenthal, Leo, and Norbert Guterman. 1970 (1949). *Prophets of Deceit*. Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1988 (1968). *Negations*. London: Free Association Books.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1948. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Trans. George J. Becker. United States: Schocken Books.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1956. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1988 (1949). *What is Literature? And Other Essays*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Smith, David. *The Social Construction of Enemies*. Unpublished essay. For information, write the Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Smith, Gerald L. K. 1978. *Besieged Patriot*. Eureka Springs, Arkansas: Elna M. Smith Foundation. (This book was used as an example of anti-semitic propaganda)

A STUDY IN AMERICAN AGITATION:  
J. EDGAR HOOVER'S SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
COMMUNIST MENACE

Kevin Gotham  
The University of Kansas

*Mid-American Review of Sociology*, 1992, Vol XVI, No. 2: 57-70

*This study is a content analysis of J. Edgar Hoover's **Masters of Deceit**, a major non-fiction bestseller published in 1958. By using the theoretical insights of the Frankfurt School, Hoover's anti-communist treatise can be thematically analyzed as a specific type of propaganda dissemination: agitation. This study will isolate and explain five agitational themes employed to symbolically construct the Communist Menace: 1. The False Religion; 2. The Apocalyptic End; 3. The Dupes; 4. The Communist Conspiracy; and 5. Trust the FBI. By probing beneath the manifest content of **Masters** an effort is made to decipher the latent content and discover the implicit mechanisms used to influence public thought.*

In his forty-eight year tenure as the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover was lovingly referred to, among other praising epitomes, as "Public Hero Number One," the "greatest," and "most wonderful American," and "America's Rock of Gibraltar."<sup>1</sup> Along with honorary degrees from nineteen of the most prestigious universities and law schools, Hoover received numerous awards, commendations, and certificates for "distinguished service," "integrity and devotion to justice," and "selfless devotion to country and god." In 1946 President Truman presented Hoover with the Medal of Merit and in 1955 President Eisenhower awarded him with the National Security Medal and Distinguished Federal Civilian Service medal in 1958. In 1964 in celebratory tribute to his fortieth year as FBI Director, Hoover received 114 plaques, scrolls, and awards (Donner 1980: 80).

These honors were only the tip of the iceberg of Hoover's enormous popularity. Probably the most popular unelected government official in the history of the United States, Hoover's approving consensus is revealed not only by the hundreds of awards he received over the years, but by his persistent high rankings in public polls. A 1953 Gallup poll showed 78% "favorable" opinion for the Director while only a minuscule 2% had an "unfavorable" opinion (20% had no opinion). A 1965 Gallup poll showed an 84% "highly favorable" rating while a May 1971 poll showed a 71% "excellent" rating for Hoover's governance of the FBI.<sup>2</sup>

Hoover's enormous popularity derived from his exploitation of the perennial American fear of radical change and symbolic defense of traditional American